

27  
135

# CAPE COD NATIONAL SEASHORE

*a proposal*

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



Memorandum

January 28, 1959

To: Director, National Park Service

From: Secretary of the Interior

Subject: Report on Cape Cod National Seashore Proposal

The draft of the report on the Cape Cod National Seashore Proposal has just been received by this office and is being reviewed.

In view of the numerous inquiries about copies of the report, please proceed as rapidly as possible with its publication, using the donated, non-Government funds available for that purpose.

The report may be released upon request, for information purposes, if a copy of this memorandum is included in the bound report to show that the report is still under consideration by the Department of the Interior, and that its publication at this time should not be construed either as approval or disapproval by this Department of its recommendations.

*W. A. Stearn*  
Secretary of the Interior

CAPE COD COMMUNITY COLLEGE



0 0201 0104959 9



*"Outermost cliff and solitary dune, the plain of ocean and the far, bright rims of the world, meadow land and marsh and ancient moor: this is . . . the outer Cape."*

—HENRY BESTON\*

## Cape Cod . . . A Vanishing Scene

A GREAT PENINSULA, shaped like a bold bent arm, thrusts some seventy miles into the Atlantic Ocean from the Massachusetts mainland. This is Cape Cod, landmark and haven for mariners who sought a new world or wrested their living from a perilous sea. Here vacationists now seek refreshment along sweeping shores and quiet coves.

Heaped up by glaciers long ago; then molded by winds and

*HEADLANDS mark Great Beach, "the outermost of outer shores."\**

Aerial photograph by Kelsey

*Front Cover: Silvery beach grasses cling to the dunes around Pilgrim Lake, North Truro.*

Photograph by Samuel Chamberlain



waves and currents, Cape Cod has been endowed with plant and animal life in rich variety. Now it is a scene of everchanging charm, beautiful to behold, fascinating to study. Surf pounds the eastern headland. Calmer waters of Cape Cod Bay and Nantucket Sound wash the Cape's northern and southern shores. Between, the winds brush heath and marsh and woodland, ruffling ponds the glaciers left behind.

On the ocean side of the Cape's forearm lies Great Beach, a magnificent ocean shore. For three centuries, this extraordinary shoreline was spared the great industrial buildup of our eastern

\* from *The Outermost House*, Rinehart & Company, publishers.



*THE TIDE ADVANCES against the glacial moraine near North Truro Light. Ocean panoramas from these heights are among America's finest.*

Photograph from Philip Gendreau, N.Y.

coast. Before the automobile age, Cape Cod was "off the beaten path." The modern highway has changed that. Now it is within a day's travel of nearly one-third of our Nation's population—less than 300 highway miles from all six New England capitals

and New York City; an hour and a half by air from Washington, D. C. And as transportation improvements continue to cut time and distance, the Cape is ever closer to all America.

The inexorable march of progress brings many and varied benefits for which we can be deeply thankful. But inevitably the march imperils other values, old and often deeply loved. This surging tide of modern progress has rolled over vast areas of our pristine coastal country, wiping out, one after another, the natural



open spaces long cherished as an American birthright. Houses, businesses, resorts of all kinds continue ever more rapidly to disrupt and destroy the very beauties we seek most to enjoy.

This is happening to Cape Cod. Even now the still-unspoiled Great Beach is vanishing under buildings. It is time to set aside, preserve, and protect the last of the "old" Cape so that the inspiration of its surpassing beauty can be kept intact and handed down to future generations of Americans.

Until now, that beauty has been protected by the good taste and care of individuals, the Towns, and the Commonwealth. Their efforts, however, may soon be engulfed by the wave of development that threatens. National protection will be needed to achieve the conservation ideals of the people who love Cape Cod.

## To Save It . . . A National Seashore

To save this irreplaceable treasure for the future, therefore, a Cape Cod National Seashore comprising Great Beach and related areas is proposed.

Great Beach is unquestionably of National Seashore caliber. This became evident during a 1954-55 survey of park and recreation possibilities along the Atlantic and Gulf coastlines. The survey, conducted by the National Park Service with donated funds, found Great Beach to be among the finest seashores on our entire Atlantic Coast. More detailed studies then were made to determine the full potential and possible boundaries for an area dedicated to public purposes.

The beach itself was the most obvious feature of National

Seashore quality. But the studies made clear that Cape Cod's charm is not confined to the shore alone. Heath, marsh, forest land, and lake, each with its community of plant and animal life, also are basic elements of the Cape's distinctive character. They form a unity, one near and palpable memory of glacial times, for continental ice has shaped them all. Examples of each must be included in the proposed National Seashore if it is to preserve intact this



*ON GLACIAL BANKS in Truro a man may stand "and put all America behind him."*

National Park Service photograph



*MARSH GRASS STIRS across broad reaches of Cape Cod. Mysterious in mood, these marshes support a wealth of plant and animal life.*

Massachusetts Audubon Society photograph by Allen H. Morgan

whole complex of natural features, essentially unaffected by surrounding land uses.

The proposal, therefore, is a National Seashore of about 30,000 acres. It is a ribbon-like territory, extending some 40 miles along the outer coast from Provincetown to the tip of Nauset Beach

and nearby Morris Island and Harding Beach in Chatham. The bulk of the area lies east of U.S. Highway 6, and its average width approximates one mile. The area reaches a maximum width of four miles in the central section, where it extends across the highway to include a highly significant cross-section of the outer Cape and a portion of the Cape Cod Bay shore.

The finest of the Cape's natural attractions are represented in this proposed National Seashore. The suggested boundaries would guard the setting against future intrusions, and have been drawn to exclude villages and commercial areas.

## The Significance of a Cape Cod National Seashore

National significance—scenic, scientific, or historic stature so great, so precious as to make its preservation the concern of all Americans—this is the criterion for areas to be included within the National Park System. Cape Cod meets this criterion eminently with a range of qualities stimulating to people in all walks of life. Attesting the magnetic appeal of the Cape are the many artists and photographers who have long appreciated its esthetic values. Writers as well find inspiration in the scene and in the colorful history of the region. Scholars and nature lovers alike take keen interest here in a wealth of plants, birds, and animals; in the life of the sea, and in the record of a glacial past.

On Cape Cod one process—glaciation—shaped many landscapes. Different plant communities then spread across them, adding variety to variety. The proposed National Seashore area is relatively small,



but because of these extraordinary geological and biological factors, its scenery is unusually interesting.

These factors, of course, make the proposed National Seashore a valuable field for scientific study. Nowhere on this continent is the story of glacial deposition, combined with the violent action of the sea upon a land mass, so vividly illustrated as on Cape Cod. Here the results of these forces are manifest, not on far mountains but in the very sands and gravels under foot.

Nowhere in this North Atlantic region does so impressive an unbroken ocean beach border such a scenic and interesting hinterland. The Cape's mild maritime climate not only is favorable for recreation but also maintains on the peninsula many types of vegetation. Still persisting are northern plants and trees that

*WAVES EDGE IN, seagulls poise in a glistening pattern of the strand.*

Massachusetts Audubon Society photograph by Allan D. Cruickshank





flourished on the Cape immediately following the retreat of the glacial ice. A warm era a thousand years ago brought southern species that yet linger here.

*GREAT POND, Wellfleet, one of many lakes left by the glaciers, provides a placid contrast to the ocean nearby.*

National Park Service photograph

To the haven of Cape Cod come multitudes of birds, winging the Atlantic flyway to nest or sojourn here. The sea and the tidal marshes hold myriad lives. The tiny creatures of the beach withstand an ocean's battering, and beneath the deep water the schools of fish move in ways no man has fully fathomed.

Historically significant, Cape Cod was the Pilgrims' first land-





fall in the New World, and in later years harbored many of New England's famed fishing and whaling fleets. Courage sailed those fleets; faith awaited their return. The men and women Cape Cod reared have bequeathed to America a proud, intrepid heritage.

Representing the best of Cape Cod's natural features, the proposed National Seashore holds many and varied recreation opportunities. Swimming in the surf; hiking the dunes, beaches, and forests are pleasures that can be widely enjoyed. Opportunities are also excellent for camping, boating, and bicycling, as well as for photography, sketching, bird study, and nature research of many kinds. Cape Cod is among the ten most famous salt water fishing areas of the United States.

These healthful activities, which bring us close to earth and sea, help in turn to make us realize Cape Cod's truly great significance. Through these types of recreation we can better see the subtle splendors of the Cape, feel the pulse of nature, and remember a stalwart history. Thus do we gain inspiration from the scene.

We must cherish and protect that scene, however, or our eagerness for recreation will abuse it. In administering areas within the National Park System, it is the duty of the National Park Service under law to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

Here is an area where, under such a policy, a part of Cape Cod's outstanding recreation values may be conserved for public benefit and use, without harm to the features on which that recreation depends.



*NAUSET BEACH, Orleans: Few coasts remain where boys can play in such wild spaciousness.*

Photograph by Peggy Hobbs

## Changing Landscapes . . . Changing Moods

Cape Cod's "mightie headland" facing the Atlantic has been the subject of comment since mariners first charted it. Thoreau named it Great Beach. "A man may stand there," he wrote, "and



Race Point Light

put all America behind him." This outer beach extends from Race Point on the tip of the Cape to the southern end of Nauset Beach in Chatham, a distance of about 40 miles. It is broken only once at Nauset Harbor Inlet.

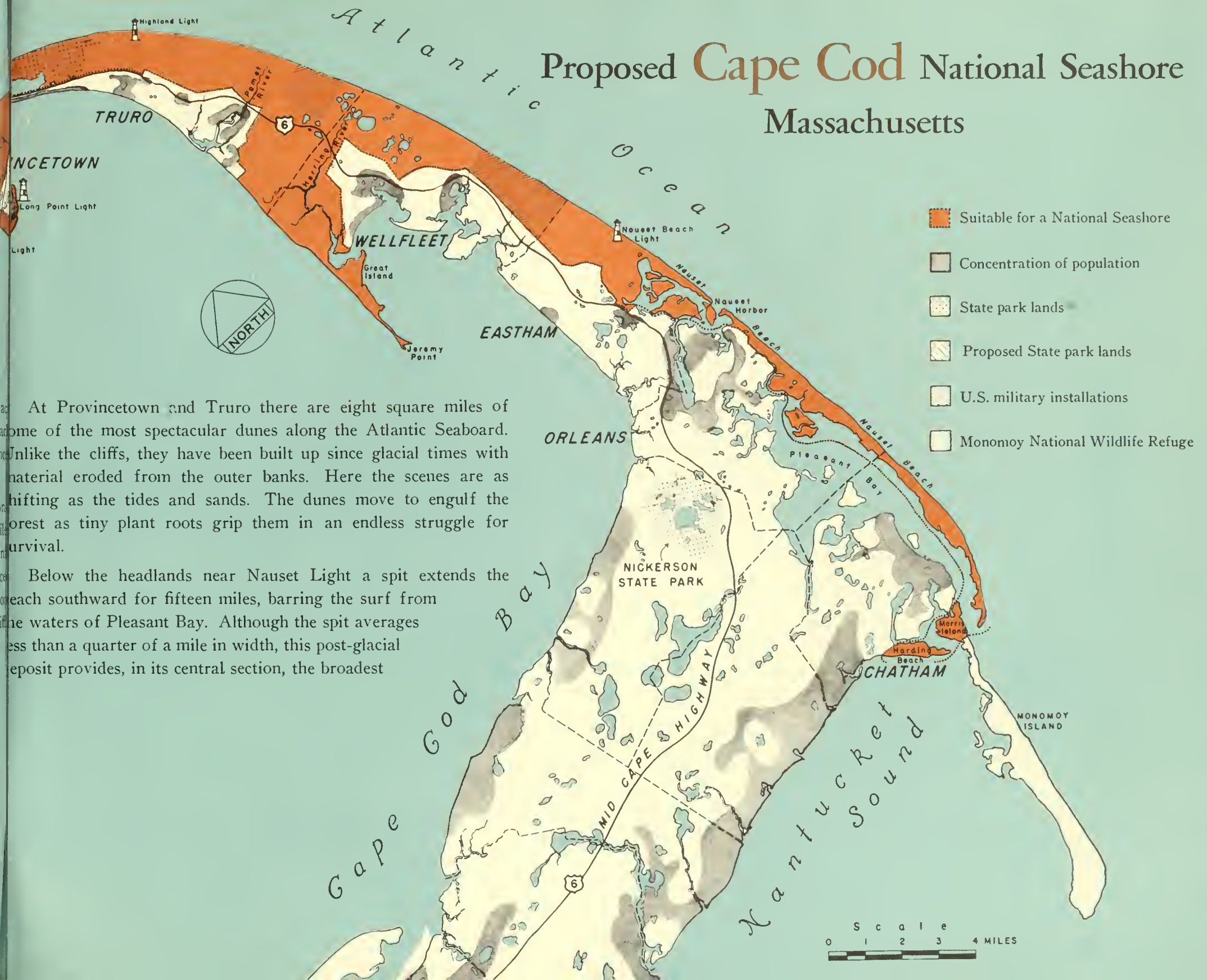
The mood of the outer beach changes with time, tide, season and weather, creating unlimited visual impressions. Fifteen miles of the central section are characterized by the bank of original glacial deposits, varying in height from 50 to 175 feet and sliced by the elements into clean-sloping cliffs. Ocean panoramas from these heights are among the finest in America. Below, the cliff wall in a solitude of beach and surf.

*A FISHERMAN bails his dory, gulls hover for scraps in a timeless seafaring scene.*

© National Geographic Society photograph by Robert F. Sisson



# Proposed Cape Cod National Seashore Massachusetts



At Provincetown and Truro there are eight square miles of some of the most spectacular dunes along the Atlantic Seaboard. Unlike the cliffs, they have been built up since glacial times with material eroded from the outer banks. Here the scenes are as shifting as the tides and sands. The dunes move to engulf the forest as tiny plant roots grip them in an endless struggle for survival.

Below the headlands near Nauset Light a spit extends the beach southward for fifteen miles, barring the surf from the waters of Pleasant Bay. Although the spit averages less than a quarter of a mile in width, this post-glacial deposit provides, in its central section, the broadest

*PICTURESQUE PROVINCETOWN, near the proposed National Seashore, offers scenes of traditional Cape Cod life.*

Photograph by Samuel Chamberlain



beach along the entire outer arm of the Cape. Low dunes lie behind the beach, and behind the dunes are picturesque marshes rich in bird and marine life.

A different, a more placid mood pervades that section of the proposed National Seashore that borders Cape Cod Bay. Along a representative six and a half miles of beach north of Jeremy Point, the sea is gentle and the strand is wide. The 500 acres of Jeremy Point, Great Beach Hill, and Great Island, linked to the Cape only by a strip of sand, seem isolated and remote. Yet they offer views of traditional Cape Cod life and activity. From here one can watch clam diggers probing the beaches, and can see the far steeples of Provincetown, the sails that fleck The Cove, the fishing boats riding in Wellfleet Harbor.

Up from the northern half of the bayside beach roll extensive heathlands reminiscent of old England's countryside. Maples and tupelos mark the course of the Herring River, haunt of mink and muskrat. Wild geese and ducks feed in the marshes of Duck Harbor and Bound Brook. Eastward, heath and marsh give way to forests of pitch pine and mixed hardwoods extending to the salt spray of the Atlantic.

These woodlands hold another Cape Cod world, so near the crashing surf yet secret from it and serene. Fresh-water ponds lap softly here, spangled with water lilies and edged with rushes, pickerel weed, and water lobelia. Inkberry and sweet pepper bushes crowd banks which once surrounded buried icebergs, for these ponds now fill glacial "kettleholes" left by the melted ice. There are twenty named ponds in the area, ranging in size to 109 acres and with characteristics differing with drainage and exposure to wind. North of the ponds, amid the Cape's most rugged countryside, the headwaters of the Pamet and Little Pamet rivers flow through valleys once cut by glacial torrents.



Off the elbow of Cape Cod lies Monomoy Island, a ten-mile length of barrier beach where only shrubs and grasses have withstood the sea's salt lash. Monomoy is a National Wildlife Refuge administered by the United States Department of the Interior, and provides nesting, feeding, and resting grounds for more than three hundred species of birds. Morris Island and Harding Beach, two important natural areas closely associated with Monomoy Island, are highly desirable as part of the proposed National Seashore. Excellent forest cover, animal life, a rare coast white cedar bog, and an interesting geologic history add to the attraction of Morris Island. Harding Beach is the only beach on the south shore of the Cape in the suggested Seashore area.

## Looking Back...

### A Landmark of History

Indians were living on Cape Cod well before the Christian era. Sites excavated by archeologists disclose a continuous Indian occupation down to historic times.

The Vikings may have been the first white men to see Cape Cod. Indeed, the "Wonder Strands" they afterwards described may well have been Great Beach.

Unnamed fishermen followed the Vikings, and their unrecorded tales probably helped to turn explorers west rather than east during the 15th and 16th centuries. John Cabot was perhaps the first explorer to round the Cape. Then came Verrazano; Bartholomew Gosnold, who gave the Cape its name; Champlain, pioneer geographer of the region; and Captain John Smith, who drew the first



*DOORWAY TO HISTORY: the old Atwood House in nearby Chatham.*

Photograph by Samuel Chamberlain

accurate map of it. Cape Cod was inevitably a landmark in the Age of Exploration.

Landmark became landing place when the Pilgrims arrived in Provincetown Harbor in November 1620. These New England

founders lingered a few weeks at the Cape while making their first tentative contacts with a strange new world. From here they sailed to find the harbor—Plymouth—that became their home. Permanent settlement of Cape Cod did not come until 1637.

Seafaring conditioned the Cape's development in the years

following, when every little harbor and estuary had its fishing fleet. The Cape's "drift whaling" and "shore whaling" of the 17th century began the great American whaling saga that was to reach its climax in the mid-19th century. Provincetown, a leading fishing center after the Revolutionary War, remained also a whaling port of consequence even when Nantucket and New Bedford later dominated that famous industry. Sharing Provincetown's prosperity were Truro, Chatham, and Wellfleet. In 1851, Wellfleet stood second only to Gloucester in fishing, and from 1830 to 1870 it was the "oyster capital" of New England.

Cape Cod's fishing prosperity built an important salt industry, with its salt works, fish drying racks, and picturesque windmills. Lighthouses, the earliest built in 1797, meanwhile stood witness to the hazard of a coast that perhaps has equal claim with Hatteras to be called "Graveyard of the Atlantic."

Salvage from British warships wrecked off Great Beach during the Revolutionary War helped Cape Codders to weather a British blockade. Although only Falmouth on the lower Cape was raided, an enemy squadron occupied Provincetown Harbor, and the entire peninsula lived under the threat of naval attack. Cape whalingmen, their normal activities disrupted, became privateersmen, sailing in whatever home ships could be freed or manning the privateers of other ports.

In modern times, World Wars I and II brought stern reminders of this earlier enemy activity. On the beach at East Orleans fell the only hostile shots, reportedly, to land on American soil in



*HISTORIC CHARM surrounds the proposed National Seashore, complementing its natural scenes. This windmill in neighboring Eastham dates from 1793. The meeting house in Wellfleet, also close by, typifies Cape Cod's architectural heritage.*

Photographs by Samuel Chamberlain









World War I—fired by a German U-boat. Residents today remember survivors of torpedoed American transports in World War II being brought ashore at Provincetown.

## Looking Ahead... A Legacy Preserved

Recreation has long been the most productive use of the lands still suitable for the proposed Cape Cod National Seashore. Low fertility makes them unsuitable for agriculture, and transportation distances, lack of raw material, and possible depletion of fresh water under extensive use greatly limit their industrial potential. The economic history of the Cape reflects a continuous change from the original broad economic base of fishing and agriculture to specialization in recreation services. Without immediate preservation of the Cape's natural features, however, there is great danger that the recreational qualities which have drawn increasing numbers to the Cape each year will soon be lost for all time, consumed by commercialization and real estate subdivisions.

In order not to damage the values which the National Seashore would preserve, any facilities needed in it would be held to the minimum consistent with public safety, comfort, and enjoyment. No major commercial enterprises within the boundaries are necessary or contemplated. Private enterprise in the adjoining communities would therefore be relied upon to supply meals, lodging, wares, and

*WOODLANDS to walk in, wildlife to study—Cape Cod offers varied recreation.*

Massachusetts Audubon Society photograph by Allen H. Morgan
























preliminary

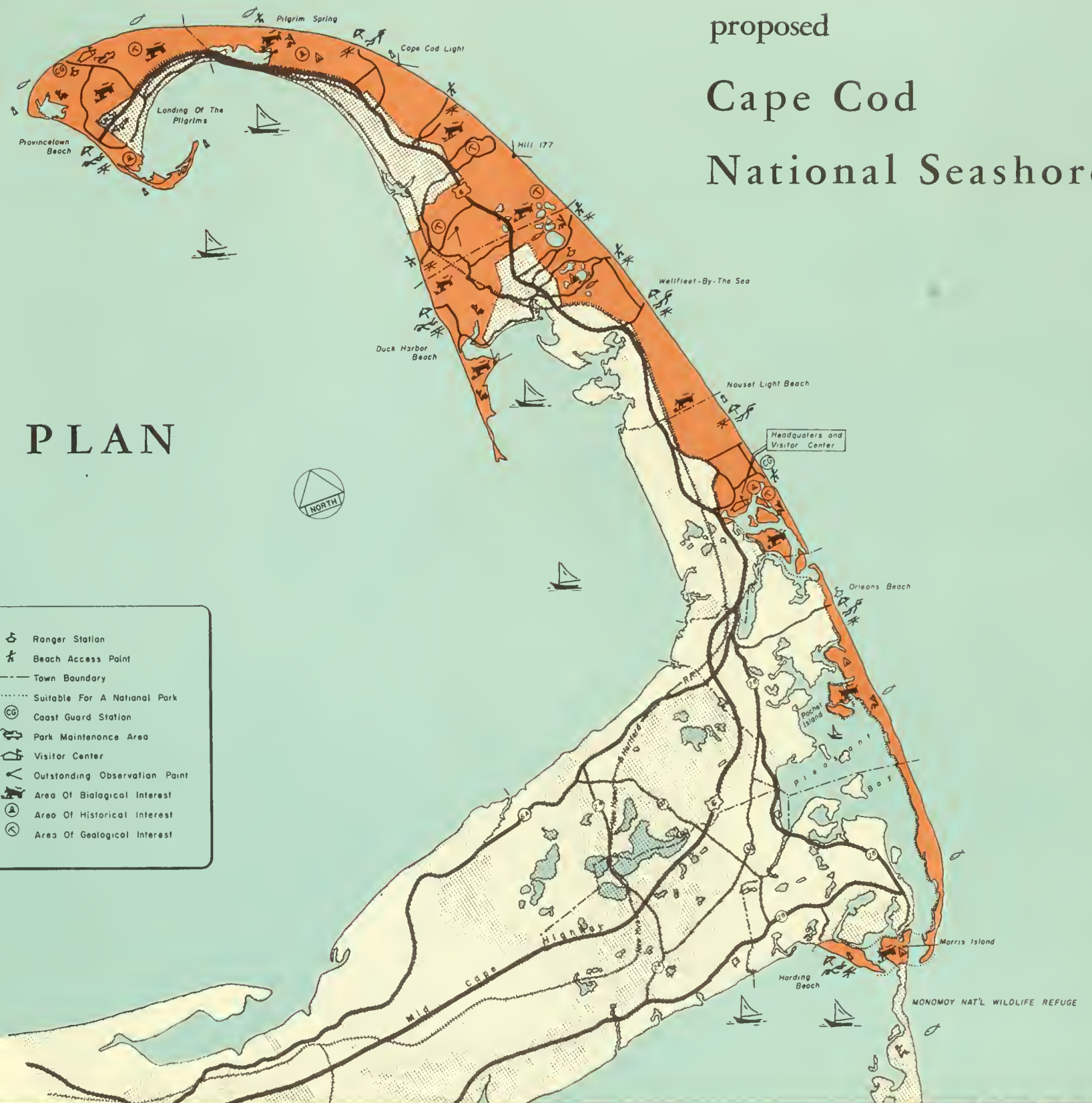
# LAND USE PLAN

proposed

Cape Cod

National Seashore

LEGEND	
	Beach Activities Area
	Swimming
	Picnicking Permitted
	Good Fishing Area
	Camping Area
	Boating Waters
	Good Birdwatching Area
	Lighthouse
	Principal Highway Routes
	Secondary Roads
	Ranger Station
	Beach Access Point
	Town Boundary
	Suitable For A National Park
	Coast Guard Station
	Park Maintenance Area
	Visitor Center
	Outstanding Observation Point
	Area Of Biological Interest
	Area Of Historical Interest
	Area Of Geological Interest





*DAWN BREAKS; Nauset Light ends another watch. Coast Guard beacons on the Cape warn weathering ships of danger.*

Photograph from Philip Gendreau, N.Y.

visitor services. Many such businesses already exist, and it is anticipated that they can be expanded as demand increases.

Development in the Seashore would consist primarily of centers where visitors could learn about the area; ranger stations; camping, picnicking, and swimming places with adjacent parking; wayside exhibits, and a system of trails. Roads would be of a type that would permit safe, leisurely enjoyment of the scenery, and portions of the area would be left roadless to preserve their characteristic charm of remoteness.

In planning essential facilities, extreme care would of course

be taken to insure that they not obtrude upon natural and historic features. Structures within the boundaries of the Seashore would be designed to blend harmoniously with the natural scene and with the traditional Cape Cod architecture.

The primary purpose of the proposed Cape Cod National Seashore is to preserve henceforth for public enjoyment the scenic, scientific, and historic features that exist here. To the people of Cape Cod, whose livelihood depends upon an economy springing from the Cape's natural recreation resources, this means insurance for the future. And, to the people of the Nation, this means that a source of quiet peace and inspiration, fast disappearing elsewhere, will always be available here, becoming more meaningful to each succeeding generation.

*"The great rhythms of nature . . . have here  
their spacious and primeval liberty"*

—from *The Outermost House*.

*SURF FOAMS in awesome grandeur when winter storms  
have passed: a December morning on the Cape Cod coast  
in Wellfleet.*

© National Geographic Society photograph by Robert F. Sisson

*Back Cover: Wild geese in flight.*

Massachusetts Audubon Society photograph by Leslie Campbell







FRED A. SEATON, *Secretary*



CONRAD L. WIRTH, *Director*